ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME
DIVISION OF COMMERCIAL FISHERIES
NEWS RELEASE

Sam Cotten, Commissioner
Scott Kelley, Director

Contact:
Aaron Tiernan, Area Management Biologist
Colton Lipka, Assistant Area Management Biologist
Phone: (907) 267-2100
Fax: (907) 267-2442

Anchorage Area Office
333 Raspberry Rd
Anchorage, AK 99518
Date Issued: October 4, 2018
Time: 12:00 p.m.

2018 Preliminary Kuskokwim Area Salmon Season Summary

Kuskokwim Area Management

The 2018 fishing season was the third consecutive year since statehood that there were no large-scale commercial salmon buyer/processors in the Kuskokwim Area. This resulted in very little opportunity for fishermen in District 1 and no opportunity for fishermen in District 4 (Quinhagak) and District 5 (Goodnews Bay).

Kuskokwim River

Preseason Forecast and Inseason Subsistence Management

The 2018 Kuskokwim River Chinook salmon forecast was for a total run of 116,000–150,000 fish. The drainagewide Chinook salmon sustainable escapement goal (SEG) is 65,000–120,000 fish. Average subsistence Chinook salmon harvest is 84,000 fish.

Preseason management actions including early season subsistence fishing closures, tributary closures, time and area restrictions, gillnet mesh size and length restrictions, and live release requirements were jointly recommended by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) in an effort to achieve escapement goals. The Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group (Working Group) and the Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission (KRITFC) voted to support the management actions.

An early season subsistence fishing closure was initiated on May 25 from the mouth of the Kuskokwim River up to Tuluksak; May 30 from Tuluksak up to the Yukon Delta Refuge Boundary at Aniak; June 4 from the Yukon Delta boundary at Aniak up to the Holitna River mouth and upstream of Holitna River mouth beginning June 9, 2018. With the closure came additional restrictions, including tributary closures and live release of Chinook salmon requirements. During the front-end closure there were two gillnet opportunities with 4-inch or

less mesh to allow subsistence fishers time to harvest non-salmon species. These openings occurred on May 30 and June 6.

Beginning June 12, the Federal Subsistence Board adopted a Special Action to close the Kuskokwim Chinook salmon fishery to non-Federally qualified users within the boundary of the Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge (NWR). The USFWS managed the subsistence fishery within the Yukon Delta NWR through July 6 at which time ADF&G resumed management of the entire Kuskokwim River.

Subsistence management under ADF&G consisted of a June 12, 12 hour 6-inch or less mesh, 25 fathom gill net opportunity in Section 4 (from the refuge boundary at Aniak to the Holitna River mouth) and opened Section 5 (Holitna River mouth to headwaters) until further notice with 6-inch or less mesh, 25 fathom gill nets. Section 4 opened again on June 19 with a 24 hour 6-inch or less mesh, 25 fathom gillnet opportunity and on June 25, subsistence fishing with 6-inch or less mesh, 25 fathom gillnets was opened until further notice. Beginning July 6, the entirety of the mainstem of the Kuskokwim River was open to 6-inch or less mesh, 25 fathoms in length until further notice with 50 fathom in length gillnets being allowed downstream of the Johnson River mouth. Mainstem gear restrictions were removed on July 26 and the tributary restrictions were lifted on August 16. The tributary restrictions were kept in place beyond the mainstem restrictions for the purpose of conservation while Chinook salmon were on their spawning grounds.

Postseason subsistence harvest surveys are presently being conducted. An assessment of subsistence salmon harvest in 2018 will not be available until after postseason harvest surveys have been completed, data have been analyzed, and preliminary harvest estimates are produced.

District 1 Commercial Fishery

2018 Commercial Harvest Outlook and Harvest

	Chinook	Sockeye	Coho	Chum
2018 Outlook	0	5,000–20,000	80,000–140,000	100,000–150,000

Due to the lack of a large-scale commercial buyer/processor, only a few short commercial fishing opportunities directed at coho salmon were provided in the Kuskokwim River in early to mid-August resulting in well below average harvests. Participants included those commercial fishermen who had registered with the department as catcher/sellers and had secured their own markets. Due to the small number of participants during these commercial fishing periods State of Alaska confidentially requirements prohibit release of the harvest.

Run Timing and Escapement

Chinook Salmon

The preliminary Kuskokwim River total run estimate is approximately 140,891 Chinook salmon (95% CI: 113,093–175,521). The Kuskokwim River drainagewide escapement goal was likely achieved but will not be fully assessed until after all data has been analyzed this winter.

Due to the early season subsistence fishery closures, Bethel Test Fish (BTF) was limited as an indicator of Chinook salmon run timing. Subsistence harvest is historically weighted towards the

beginning of the run, and the lack of this early season fishery resulted in the evaluation of a larger proportion of the early run than other years on record. Run timing was average based on BTF.

Preliminary Chinook salmon escapement at Kogrukluk River weir is 5,757 fish, which is within the established SEG range of 4,800–8,800 fish. Preliminary Chinook Salmon escapement of 3,421 fish to the George River weir exceeded the established SEG range of 1,800–3,300 fish. Escapement at Kwethluk River weir was not assessed due to the project being inoperable for the majority of the Chinook salmon migration (Table 1). Seven tributaries have aerial survey SEGs and all seven tributaries were within the respective SEG ranges (Table 2).

Sockeye Salmon

Based on BTF, sockeye salmon run timing was late. Overall, sockeye salmon escapement was well above average across the drainage. The preliminary Kogrukluk River weir escapement of 18,934 sockeye salmon exceeded the established SEG range of 4,400–17,000 fish. The Telaquana weir observed the highest escapement of sockeye salmon since the project was established in 2010 with a count of 197,324 fish (Table 3).

Chum Salmon

Chum salmon run timing at BTF was late and escapement projects showed an average run. The preliminary escapement count of 45,230 fish at the Kogrukluk River weir achieved the established SEG range of 15,000–49,000 fish (Table 4).

Coho Salmon

Coho salmon run timing was only partially assessed at BTF due to project operational dates. This season the project ended operations a week early due to a boating accident involving the BTF vessel. All run strength indicators point to a below average coho salmon run. Coho salmon passage at the Kwethluk River weir was below average with a count of 5,589 coho salmon, which is below the established SEG threshold of >19,000 fish. The preliminary Kogrukluk River weir coho salmon escapement did not achieve the lower bound of the SEG range of 13,000–28,000 coho salmon, with a season count of 7,700 fish (Table 5).

Kuskokwim Bay

District 4 (Quinhagak)

There were no commercial salmon fishing periods in District 4 during the 2018 season due to a lack of a buyer/processor.

Run Timing and Escapement

The Kanektok River weir did not operate in 2018 due to a lack of funding. The Chinook salmon aerial survey SEG of 3,500–8,000 fish was achieved with an estimate of 4,246 fish. The sockeye salmon aerial survey SEG 14,000–34,000 fish was exceeded with an estimate of 326,200 fish, which is the second highest escapement estimate on record (Table 6).

District 5 (Goodnews Bay)

There were no commercial salmon fishing periods in District 5 during the 2018 season due to a lack of processing capacity.

Run Timing and Escapement

The Middle Fork Goodnews River weir did not operate in during the 2018 season due to high water. An aerial survey of the North Fork Goodnews River was not conducted due to poor weather conditions during the established survey period (Table 7).

Table 1.–Chinook salmon spawning weir escapement, Kuskokwim River drainage, Kuskokwim Management Area 2008–2018.

	Chinook Salmon Escapement						
Year	Kwethluk	Tuluksak	Salmon (Aniak)	George	Kogrukluk	Tatlawiksuk	Salmon (Pitka)
2008	5,276	701	2,376	2,563	9,750	1,075	[a]
2009	5,744	362	1,656	3,663	9,528	1,071	[a]
2010	1,667	201	[a]	1,498	5,812	546	[a]
2011	4,079	288	[a]	1,547	6,731	992	[a]
2012	[a]	555	[a]	2,201	[a]	1,116	[a]
2013	[a]	193	625	1,292	1,819	495	[a]
2014	3,187	320	1,757	2,993	3,732	1,904	[a]
2015	8,163	709	2,285	2,281	7,639	2,095	6,736
2016	3,555	909	[a]	1,663	7,056	2,494	6,326
2017	7,404	609	2,446	3,671	9,984	2,174	8,003
2018 [b]	[a]	[a]	2,277	3,421	5,757	[a]	5,317
SEG	4,100–7,500			1,800–3,300	4,800–8,800		
Average 2008–2017	4,884	485	1,917	2,337	6,895	1,396	6,596

[a] Weir did not operate, or counts were incomplete.
[b] Preliminary numbers subject to change.

Table 2.–Chinook salmon spawning aerial survey index estimates, Kuskokwim River Drainage, Kuskokwim Management Area, 2008–2018.

	Lower Kuskokwim River [a]				Middle Kuskokwim River [a]						Upper Kuskokwim River [a]			
Year	Eek	Kwethluk Canyon C.	Kisaralik	Tuluksak	Aniak	Kipchuk	Salmon	Holokuk	Oskawalik	Holitna	Gagarayah	Cheeneetnuk	Salmon (Pitka)	Bear (Pitka)
2008	[b]	487	1,074	[b]	3,222	1,061	589	190	213	[b]	177	290	1,305	245
2009	[b]	[b]	[b]	[b]	[b]	[b]	[b]	390	379	[b]	303	323	632	209
2010	[b]	[b]	235	[b]	[b]	[b]	[b]	108	[b]	587	62	[b]	135	75
2011	263	[b]	534	[b]	[b]	116	79	20	26	[b]	96	249	767	145
2012	[b]	[b]	610	[b]	[b]	193	49	9	51	[b]	178	229	670	[b]
2013	240	1,165	597	83	754	261	154	29	38	670	74	138	475	64
2014	206	[b]	622	[b]	3,201	1,220	497	80	200	1,785	359	340	1,865	[b]
2015	[b]	[b]	709	[b]	[b]	917	810	77	[b]	662	19	[b]	2,016	1,381
2016	[b]	[b]	622	[b]	718	898	[b]	100	47	1,157	135	217	1,578	580
2017	[b]	[b]	[b]	[b]	1,781	889	423	140	136	676	453	660	687	492
2018	[b]	[b]	584	[b]	1,534	1,123	441	162	[b]	980	438	565	1,399	550
Escapement Goal			400–1,200		1,200–2,300		330–1,200			970–2,100	300–830	340–1,300	470–1,600	
Average 2008–2017	236	826	625	83	1,935	694	372	114	136	923	186	306	1,013	399

[a] Estimates are from aerial surveys conducted during peak spawning periods under 'good' or 'fair' survey conditions.
[b] Survey was either not flown or did not meet acceptable survey criteria.

Table 3.–Sockeye salmon spawning weir escapement, Kuskokwim River drainage, Kuskokwim Management Area 2008–2018.

Year	Sockeye Salmon Escapement						
	Kwethluk	Tuluksak	George	Kogrukluk	Tatlawiksuk	Telaquana	Salmon (Aniak)
2008	2,451	188	92	19,675	39	[a]	1,181
2009	4,230	686	54	22,826	39	[a]	1,366
2010	4,239	437	113	17,139	28	72,021	[a]
2011	2,031	126	43	7,974	15	35,105	[a]
2012	[a]	187	79	[a]	9	22,994	924
2013	[a]	394	150	7,808	37	27,806	966
2014	3,778	514	156	6,413	9	23,820	894
2015	8,975	824	159	6,411	0	95,516	1,669
2016	20,495	1,509	2,807	20,087	240	82,706	254
2017	29,940	4,094	912	27,315	59	145,287	[a]
2018 [b]	6,174	[a]	1,558	18,934	[a]	197,324	2,656
SEG				4,400–17,000			
Average 2008–2017	9,146	896	557	15,072	48	78,064	1,239

[a] Weir did not operate, or counts were incomplete.
[b] Preliminary numbers subject to change.

Table 4.–Chum salmon spawning weir escapement, Kuskokwim River drainage, Kuskokwim Management Area 2008–2018.

Year	Chum Salmon Escapement						
	Kwethluk	Tuluksak	George	Kogrukluk	Tatlawiksuk	Aniak	Salmon (Aniak)
2008	20,030	12,550	29,396	44,744	30,129	427,911	9,459
2009	32,191	13,671	7,944	82,483	19,975	479,531	9,392
2010	19,235	13,042	26,275	69,258	37,737	429,643	[a]
2011	18,329	9,828	46,650	76,823	88,202	345,630	[a]
2012	[a]	16,981	33,310	[a]	44,569	[a]	[a]
2013	[a]	12,911	37,879	65,644	32,249	[a]	7,723
2014	17,941	8,724	17,148	30,763	12,455	[a]	2,890
2015	23,039	6,337	17,551	33,201	10,379	[a]	5,657
2016	22,914	5,868	20,834	45,329	10,564	[a]	817
2017	53,745	22,405	40,028	94,387	29,876	[a]	10,173
2018 [b]	29,245	[a]	45,195	45,230	[a]	[a]	18,922
SEG				15,000–49,000		222,000–480,000	
Average 2008–2018	26,297	12,232	29,292	60,292	31,614	420,679	8,129

[a] Weir did not operate, or counts were incomplete.
[b] Preliminary numbers subject to change.

Table 5.–Coho salmon spawning weir escapement, Kuskokwim River drainage, Kuskokwim Management Area, 2008–2018.

Year	Coho Salmon Escapement					
	Kwethluk	Tuluksak	George	Kogrukluk	Tatlawiksuk	Salmon (Aniak)
2008	49,972	7,457	21,931	29,237	11,022	10,974
2009	21,911	8,137	12,490	22,289	10,148	6,351
2010	[a]	1,216	12,639	14,689	3,733	[a]
2011	[a]	[a]	29,120	21,800	14,184	[a]
2012	19,960	4,407	14,478	13,421	8,015	[a]
2013	[a]	6,490	15,308	21,207	12,764	2,797
2014	43,945	13,672	35,771	52,975	19,814	8,254
2015	24,443	6,611	35,812	32,493	17,701	[a]
2016	28,852	1,857	[a]	[a]	11,897	560
2017	46,594	28,922	25,384	[a]	[a]	[a]
2018 [b]	5,589	[a]	8,993	7,700	[a]	[a]
SEG	>19,000			13,000–28,000		
Average 2008–2017	33,668	8,752	21,193	26,014	12,142	5,787

[a] Weir did not operate, or counts were incomplete.
[b] Preliminary numbers subject to change.

Table 6.–Kanektok River salmon spawning escapement estimates, 2008–2018.

	Weir Escapement				Aerial Survey Escapement	
Year	Chinook	Sockeye	Coho	Chum	Chinook[a]	Sockeye[b]
2008	[c]	[c]	[c]	[c]	3,659	38,900
2009	7,065	305,756	[c]	55,846	[d]	[d]
2010	6,537	204,954	[c]	68,186	1,228	16,950
2011	5,170	88,177	[c]	53,050	[d]	[d]
2012	1,561	115,021	[c]	28,726	[d]	[d]
2013	3,569	128,761	[c]	43,040	2,346	64,802
2014	3,594	259,406	[c]	18,602	1,871	148,800
2015	10,416	106,751	[c]	15,048	4,919	39,970
2016	[c]	[c]	[c]	[c]	5,631	80,160
2017	[c]	[c]	[c]	[c]	[d]	[d]
2018	[c]	[c]	[c]	[c]	4,246	326,200
Average 2008–2017	5,416	172,689	[c]	40,357	3,276	64,930

[a] Chinook salmon SEG is 3,500–8,000 fish.
[b] Sockeye salmon SEG is 14,000–34,000 fish.
[c] Weir did not operate, or counts were incomplete.
[d] Survey was either not flown or did not meet acceptable survey criteria.

Table 7.–Salmon spawning escapement estimates, Goodnews River Drainage, Kuskokwim Bay, 2008–2018.

	MiddleFork Goodnews R. Weir Escapement				NorthFork Goodnews R. Aerial Escapement	
Year	Chinook	Sockeye	Coho	Chum	Chinook	Sockeye
2008	2,223	43,879	37,690	39,548	2,155	32,500
2009	1,669	27,495	19,699	19,237	[a]	[a]
2010	2,176	36,574	26,287	24,789	[a]	[a]
2011	2,045	19,643	24,668	19,974	853	14,140
2012	524	29,531	11,371	9,065	378	16,710
2013	1,187	23,545	1,189	27,682	[a]	[a]
2014 [c]	750	41,473	7,594	11,518	630	[a]
2015 [c]	1,494	57,809	15,084	11,517	991	38,390
2016 [d]	3,767	170,574	[b]	41,815	1,120	90,060
2017 [d]	6,881	179,897	[b]	54,799	[a]	[a]
2018	[b]	[b]	[b]	[b]	[a]	[a]
Esc Goal	1,500–2,900	18,000–40,000	>12,000	>12,000	640–3,300	5,500–19,500
Average 2008–2017	2,272	63,042	17,948	25,994	1,021	38,360

[a] Survey was either not flown or did not meet acceptable survey criteria.
[b] Weir did not operate, or counts were incomplete.
[c] Weir operations ended Aug 31.
[d] Weir operations ended July 31.

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